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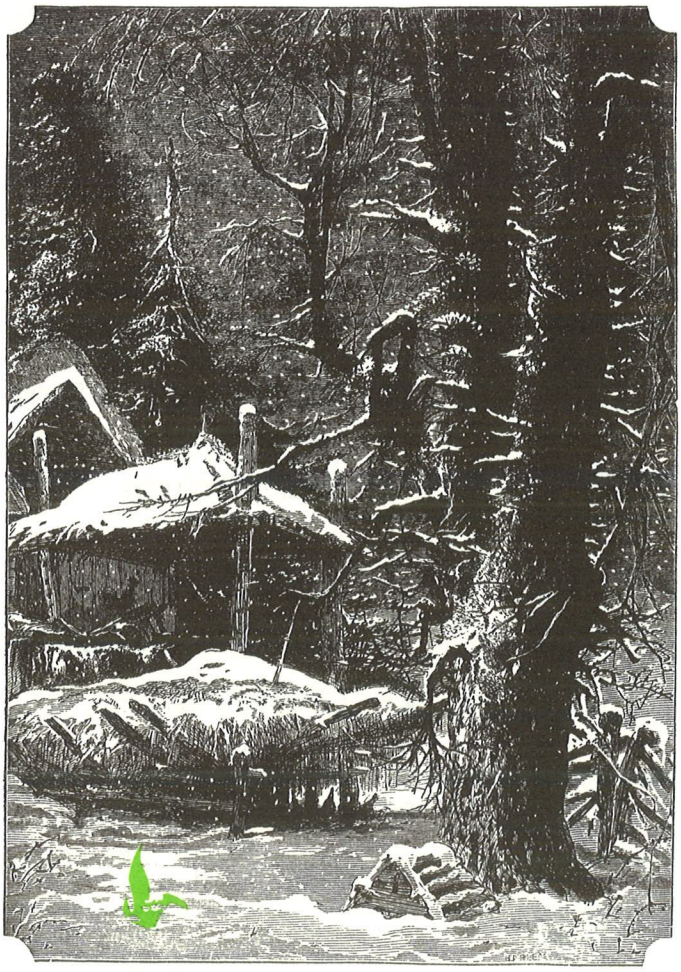

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MISSION

January, 1977 Volume 10, Number 7

TO EXPLORE THOROUGHLY THE SCRIPTURES AND THEIR MEANING ... TO UNDERSTAND AS FULLY AS POSSIBLE THE WORLD IN WHICH THE CHURCH LIVES AND HAS HER MISSION ... TO PROVIDE A VEHICLE FOR COMMUNICATING THE MEANING OF GOD'S WORD TO OUR CONTEMPORARY WORLD."
EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT, JULY, 1967

IN THE MARGINS

People in the southern part of our world can, I think, see January in a different light than their northern kin. The world is not so frozen that the promise of the New Year is hidden under ice. The soddenness of wintry rains can be unpleasant, but one senses also that they are watering the roots of spring. To tramp over decaying leaves and pine needles in the dripping woods is to be made aware of the earth's fertile potency, not its death.

It's in this light that several pieces in this issue focus on Genesis, the book of beginnings. The new year is a time of *new* beginnings, of course. But in the Christian faith those eternal renewals are grounded (literally) in the dust of God's good earth. The staff and board of the journal hope that in this issue the basis for human hopes and the yearnings for human freedom can be seen afresh; that a brighter future can be seen by looking again at our roots.

The inaugural of President Jimmy Carter also inaugurates what many hope will be an era characterized by evangelical ethics in politics. The thoughtful article by Gary Thompson (p. 18) poses both the possibilities and the limitations of any such hope. It's interesting to note that most of the protests against evangelical politics in the journals that cross our desk are from liberals who have long chided the evangelicals to get with it, politically. Gary's article raises good points for both sides.

We wish you a happy re-creation at the genesis of this year!

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Genesis: Timetable or the Book of Relationships?

By Cline Davis

What message does God have for us in the book of Beginnings? Was the creation account really intended to describe the length of time God took to set the world in order? It is the claim of this article that in its original setting the Genesis story was mainly intended to speak of the *relationship* between God and the human race, and of *relationships* between people. Throughout the Bible, claims are made about these relationships. Many of these claims were unique in the setting in which they were written, and they have a unique word for us today.

The view of relationships in the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1-2:4a stood in stark contrast to the accepted views of that time. Most people in the ancient Near-East were polytheistic and/or pantheistic. The world was thought to be populated by various gods and demons who were in control of the creation. There were gods and goddesses of the sea, harvest, storm, battle, fertility, and on and on. Among some peoples, the duties and functions of the various gods might vary or overlap, but no matter—one must know what part of the creation each god or goddess controlled in that locality. If one wanted a good harvest, he must sacrifice to the appropriate deity. If one wanted sons or daughters, or for his livestock to increase, he must sacrifice to or influence in other ways the deity or deities of fertility. One had to be careful not to offend any of the deities or they might retaliate in a storm, earthquake, fire, or other disaster. The gods' creation of mankind itself was thought to be at best an accident and at worst a mistake.

Even travel was made difficult by the fact that each city or locality had its own deity which was more or less in control. As one traveled into a locality belonging to a new deity, he must be conscious to seek the favor of that deity and to do nothing which might bring its disfavor.

Astrology was big business in many places. Before doing anything important, the stars had to be consulted since the stars, representing various deities, controlled men's destinies. If people did not turn to astrology, they relied on some other means of inquiring to the gods about the future.

Into this arena the Genesis narrative entered. It would have been looked upon as a non-religious statement of creation by most people in the ancient Near-East. All aspects of creation had been de-divinized. No part of creation, including man, was divine and therefore no part of creation had to be feared or worshiped as divine. Contrary to popular belief at that time, the sun, moon, and stars were not portrayed as deities. The Hebrew word for sun *(shemesh),* which was also the name of a pagan deity, was not used by the Genesis writer. He insured that his readers would not understand the sun to be a deity by calling it merely the "greater light."

The same is true for the Hebrew words for moon *(yare-ah)* and stars *(kokan).* Both these words were also used for the names of deities in the ancient Near-East. The Genesis writer avoided even the use of these words

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and refers to them instead as "the lesser light" and "lights in the firmament of the heavens." All parts of the creation were seen as merely the work of the one true God. The creation narrative seems to have been a deliberate rejection of the astrological and polytheistic beliefs of that time. It attempted to set men and women on a new plane in their relationship to God and his creation.

Not only was the whole creation created by one God; man himself was created in the image of that God. The Hebrew word translated "image" *(tselem)* in the the Old Testament is, with one exception (Gen. 5:3), in addition to the use in our text, used to speak of idols. The image or idol of a particular deity represented that god or goddess on earth and was thought to have some of the active force of that deity. Instead of having an idol or image set up to represent God, *man* was placed in the position of representing him. Perhaps this was why the Ten Commandments prohibited images of God (Exod. 20:4-6) since only man could represent God.

This "image" did not end with the death of Adam, but was passed on to all mankind when Adam had a son, Seth, in his "image" and "likeness" (Gen. 5:3). As God's representative, man was empowered to carry out God's will and care for the creation. He was given dominion or rule over the entire creation. This entailed not only privileges, but responsibilities as well. Man, as representative of God, had responsibility for and a stake in everything that happened on earth.

This understanding of the relationship between man and the creation, so different from that of the nations around Israel, included a radically different view of man's relationship to God. No longer is God seen as a vengeful deity who must be appeased at every turn. He is rather the One who empowered man to represent him and carry out his work on earth. Creation itself was not full of evil forces which man must fear, but was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Man was in a good creation controlled by God, who was also good.

This text, though, speaks not only about relationships between God, man and creation, but also about relationship between people.

When God created "man" he created "them" male and female (vss. 26-27). The Hebrew word translated "man" *(adham)* in these verses did not stand for a single individual, but was composed of male and female and perhaps should be translated "mankind" (See "Women in Genesis 1-3," in this issue).

This fact introduced a collective dimension into the relationship among *"adham"*—members of humankind. They were not intended to be isolated individuals, but to be in relationship with other people. It is actually male and female, or humankind in relationship, who are created in the image of God—not men and women individually. Perhaps this said implicitly to Israel that each person was in relationship with all other people; indeed, each person was his brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9). A person could not turn his back on his earthly relationships and view himself as merely in relationship to God. Relationship to God and relationship to people went hand in hand.

This relationship among people, which is seen as fundamental, allowed for the ethical emphasis in Israel. Since people were related to each other under God, actions and attitudes were extremely important. Amos stressed this as he said that Israel was to be judged, not only for improper worship but even more for a lack of justice and righteousness in everyday interaction between people (Amos 5:24).

These relationships and their basis in this creation narrative have crucial implications for us today. We worship the same God spoken of in Genesis. As Christians, therefore, we must be aware of our relationship to God, to the creation, and to other persons. Our view must never be restrictive, but rather must be broadened to include our responsibility for the whole of creation, including all people. As Christians we are responsible for concerns such as ecology—not only because it affects our quality of life, but because we, as a part of mankind, have been given that responsibility as God's representative to rule over and care for his creation. As Christians we have a responsibility for and must be concerned with everything that has to do with relationships among people, since we are a part of mankind. This should say something to us about our involvement in such areas as politics, civil rights, law enforcement policies, capital punishment, and welfare policies.

The creation narrative stands in the biblical text as the basis for any discussion of relationships between God, man, and creation. It is not, however, the only word on the subject in the Bible. The entire biblical text from Genesis to Revelation is concerned with relationships. By reading the text in light of its original setting, we can more fully understand the uniqueness of its statements about these relationships. Paradoxically, it is only as we grasp the ancient meaning that we can properly understand what the Bible is saying to us today.* □

*Special acknowledgement must be given to:

Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis,* in *The Old Testament Library,* ed. by G. Ernest Wright, John Bright, James Barr, and Peter Ackroyd, tr. by John H. Marks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1961; and

Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament,* tr. by Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers), 1958.

Woman in Genesis 1—3

By Jay Treat

Jay Treat is a campus minister at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff.

The biblical account of human beings is often cited in contemporary dicussions of the role of woman. It can be asked of Genesis whether the subordination of woman to man is part of God's blueprint for the human race. This article examines the crucial first three chapters of Genesis in search of an answer to that question.

THE FIRST ACCOUNT OF CREATION

At the beginning of Genesis are two accounts of creation. The first account, in Genesis 1:1-2:4a, is an overview of the creation of the whole world. The second account, in Genesis 2:4b-25, focuses on the creation of humanity.

The portion of the first account that concerns us here begins in verse 26. It is the sixth day of creation. God has just created the land animals. Now God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." What is meant by "man"?

The English language uses the word "man" in two different ways. Sometimes it is used generically to include both men and women; for example, "Anthropology is the study of man." Sometimes it is used to refer to a male only, as in the sentence, "Who is that man over there?" Hebrew uses two distinct words for man. The word *ish* means man as distinguished from woman. The word *adham* means man in the generic sense, without distinguishing between male and female.

To avoid confusion we should translate *adham* with generic words like humanity or humankind. To signify an individual human being, whether male or female, the Hebrew language can use the word *adham* preceded by *ha-*, which corresponds to "the" in our language. That is to say, *ha-adham* means "the human being, the person." In the rest of this article we will translate these three Hebrew expressions differently in order to distinguish them. We will translate the word *ish* with "man," the word *adham* with "humankind," and the word *ha-adham* with "the human being."

In Genesis 1:26 the word *adham* is used and we can translate accordingly.

> Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

It is God's intention to create *humankind* in his image, not just man. This humankind is intended to rule the earth and its other inhabitants.

In verse 27, God carries out his intention:

So God created *ha-adham* (the individual human being) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

This verse states explicitly that *adham* was not only male—*"male and female* he created them."

This combination of male and female meanings in the word *adham* is also found in Genesis 5:1-2, which is a summary of the preceding material. It reads:

> This is the book of the generations of humankind. When God created humankind, he made him in the likeness of God. *Male and female* he created them, and he blessed them and called their name Humankind when they were created.

Here we learn that when God created man and woman he named both of them *Adham.* The English form of this name is Adam. It means Humankind. In Genesis 3:20, we will see how the man gave the woman another name after the fall and kept the God-given name for himself alone.

To summarize to this point, God has planned and created a creature named Humankind to rule the other creatures. This ruling creature is different from all others because it is in God's own image. It is both male and female.

In verse 28, God speaks to them, male and female, giving them both his basic direction.

> And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

In this command, God does not set out different spheres or roles for the male and female. Instead, both are given the same double command: to beget and to rule the earth. The Hebrew verbs used in the commands are plural. This means that each command applies as fully to the female as to the male, and as fully to the male as to the female. Together they are called to beget, and together they are called to rule over all the other creatures on earth. Neither sex is called to rule the other.

Together they are called to beget, and together they are called to rule over all the creatures on earth. Neither sex is called to rule the other.

Next, God provides food for his creatures. Verse 31 then records:

> And God saw everthing that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

God finds everything just as it is to his satisfaction.

THE SECOND ACCOUNT OF CREATION

The second account of God's creation begins as follows:

> In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no humankind to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground—then the Lord God formed the human being of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human being became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the East; and there he put the human being whom he had made.

After a description of the trees and rivers of Eden, the text goes on:

> The Lord God took the human being and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the human being, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

The pronouns make it clear that the lone human being referred to here is a male. Yet, the text has still not used the word *ish,* "man." No significance is attached to the fact that he is a male. What is important in the text is that he is a human being.

God next expresses his knowledge that something is yet lacking.

> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the human being should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

Many misunderstandings have arisen out of the phrase translated "a helper fit for him" because of the meaning that "help" has in our time. When someone speaks of "help" we naturally think of employees or subordinates—"You just can't get good help these days!" However, the Hebrew word *ezer* (help or helper) never refers to a subordinate. It either refers to an equal as in Isaiah 30:5 or to a superior as in Psalm 121:1-2:

> I lift up my eyes to the hills.
> From whence does my help come?
> My help comes from the Lord,
> who made heaven and earth.

Therefore, nothing in the Hebrew word for help suggests that the helper is a subordinate.

The literal translation of the phrase is "a helper as his counterpart." There is no idea of subordination or inferiority in it—quite the opposite! We could avoid the common misunderstanding of the word "helper" by translating the whole phrase "a helper as his counterpart" with an English word that conveys the same meaning: "partner."

> Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the human being should be alone; I will make him a partner."

Next, God guides the human being to the discovery that no animal is suitable for his needs of partnership:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the human being to see what he would call them; and whatever the human being called every living creature, that was its name. The human being gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the human being there was not found a partner.

God sets about to remedy this situation.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human being, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the human being he made into a woman and brought her to the human being. Then the human being said,

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.

Many Christians interpret these words as an allusion to Christ. Even so, it is the result of sin and is clearly adverse in its effect on the serpent. The New Testament, however, nowhere understands this verse as a prophecy of Christ. It seems to explain the mutual hatred between people and serpents that causes each to harm the other, an example of the alienation between human beings and nature. Also as a result of sin, the serpent must now crawl on its belly and eat dust, signs of degradation (see Mic. 7:17). These are the consequences of sin for the serpent.

At last the man has found a partner—the flesh of his flesh and the bone of his bone. This is not a picture of male supremacy but a vision of the harmony for which humans are created.

This at last is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman
because she was taken out of man.

When the original human being sees his partner, he is moved to cry out "at last!" All the other times that a prospect had been presented, it had not proved suitable as a partner. But this time, at last, he has found a partner—the flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. This is not a picture of male supremacy but a vision of the harmony for which human beings were created. It is an example for following generations, as the next verse indicates.

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Like the first account of creation, the second account nowhere suggests that women are subject to men. In fact, one of its main points is their partnership.

THE ACCOUNT OF THE FALL

Genesis 3 explains how the original harmony of creation was disrupted. It explains the alienation that we find in our everyday life: the alienation of human beings from God, from nature, and from other human beings.

This change from life to death is caused by the sin of the man and of the woman. The text places no more blame on one party than on the other, although both the man and the woman try to pass the blame along to someone else. The fact of the biblical account is: male and female he created them, male and female they went astray.

In verses 14-19, God sets out the consequences of the fall to the guilty parties. Each consequence shows how sin replaces harmony with discord, fulfillment with frustration, and communion with alienation. Each of these consequences is adverse in its effect; each is a curse.

One possible exception to this observation is verse 15, in which God tells the serpent,

The consequence for the man is death. God had not wanted him to die. He had warned him, "In the day that you eat of it you shall die." Since the man did sin, he shall die. He will also meet death every day in the form of frustration because the land is cursed. From now on his work will be toil. None of this is God's good intention for his creature; it is the wages of sin.

Also as a result of sin, the woman will experience pain when she bears children. As late as this century, the words "I will greatly multiply your pain childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children," were used as a proof-text against the use of anesthesia during child-birth. "In pain you shall bring forth children," was read as a command of God to all women. This use of 3:16a assumes that in the curse God is stating what *ought* to be. Fortunately, most people have now realized that the curse states what *will* be instead of what God desires. It seems almost inconceivable that people of the past withheld available pain relief from women in labor on the basis of this verse. Multiplied pain in childbirth is not what God desires for every woman. Such pain is the unfortunate product of sin.

The same logic follows with regard to the last part of the same verse. Many have understood the words, "He shall rule over you," as a command also. But God does not say, "Be ruled by him," or "You shall not rule." Nor does he instruct the man, "Rule over her." The subordination of woman is no more a command of God than is painful childbirth. As in the other cases in verses 14-19, God is describing the consequences of the fall. Instead of the original partnership of male and female that God had established and considered good, the man will exercise dominion over his wife.

Nowhere in the Genesis accounts does God give the man dominion over his wife—not even after the fall. In the original order of creation that God considered "very good," both shared dominion over the other creatures of the earth. This equality and partnership was God's will for

humankind created in his image. If the man and woman had not sinned, partnership would still exist between them. The change from partnership to subordination is one more example of the alienating power of sin.

We have already noticed in Genesis 5:1-2 that God had given both the man and the woman the name Humankind when he created them. Now living in a fallen condition, the man renames his wife. "The human being called his wife's name Life, because she was the mother of all living." By naming her, he has already begun to exercise dominion over her as God said he would. He does not call her by the name God gave her. He does not even allow her to name herself. Instead, he names her just as he had named the animals which were properly his subordinates. She will no longer be Adam, fellow-ruler over earth. She will be Eve, subordinate.

Apparently she decided to go along with this less-than-perfect arrangement. She accepted a status less than that her Creator had given her. No doubt this retreat from responsibility provided a certain comfort—"From now on I'll just let *him* make all the mistakes!" Adam perpetuates his sin by beginning a policy of prideful domination, and Eve perpetuates hers by a policy of passive irresponsibility.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Does Eve's subordination justify the subordination of later women? Perhaps one might reason that the account implies as much. But if so, it justifies *only* the subordination of a woman *to her own husband.* The text does not mention a subordination of women in general to men in general. It says only, "Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you."

In addition, if the account justifies the subordination of wives, it does so only as a consequence of sin and not as the good pleasure of God. Subordination is a fallen state. It can be justified only as an accommodation to an imperfect situation in order that a greater evil may be avoided. For example, young women in Titus' congregation were to be submissive to their husbands "that the word of God may not be spoken against" by outsiders (Titus 2:3-5). In the same way, slaves were to be submissive (Titus 2:9-10). Yet who will claim that slavery is ordained by God's good will?

We try to avoid the pain of travail, frustrating work, and death. It would be inhuman and sinful to promote these things deliberately. We invent anesthetics and breathing techniques for coping with labor pains; we make agricultural advances to aid us in the fight against the thorn and the thistle; we enlist every power we can to combat death. But like pain, toil, and death, subordination of woman is part of the wages of sin.

It is true that we find ourselves living as fallen creatures under the reign of sin and death. We are subject to pain, toil, and alienation. Yet it is precisely that reign of sin and death from which Jesus is freeing us.

I will sing of my Redeemer
And His wondrous love to me;
On the cruel cross He suffered,
From the curse to set me free.

Those who are being set free from the reign of sin owe no loyalty to its curse. Instead, we should live in a way most consistent with our creation in the image of God.

> You have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator (Col. 3:9-10).

□

FANTASY

What if—just suppose—tomorrow all the Christians in the world begin to get better-looking, and all the non-Christians start getting uglier. The Christian students begin making all the top grades in school; the others start to flunk out. Christianity becomes *the* major success factor, so much so that the prosperity of a business or a community or a football team is in direct proportion to the number of Christians associated with it. What if that were to happen—the Christians become the attractive, wealthy, successful ones, who always win; the non-Christians become the ugly, poor, failure-prone ones, who always lose.

You can imagine what would happen. We would see a religious revival the likes of which the world has never seen! All the churches, stadiums, and auditoriums in America could not contain the "truth-seekers."

Wouldn't it be *great*, if it were only that way? No. In fact, it would be hard to imagine anything more alien to New Testament Christianity than such a world as our fantasy envisions. The values we absorb from our culture may attempt to convince us that herein lies the good life, but such is not the promise of Scripture.

The real world in which God has placed us is one where the rain (and success and failure and beauty and ugliness) falls on just and unjust alike. And the call of the Lord Jesus is not to attainment, achievement, and acquisition, but to footwashing (John 13:14) and cross-bearing (Luke 14:26, 27) and even death (John 12:24 ff.).

You probably won't be able to sell toothpaste or Buicks with that kind of appeal, but then the ambitions of the world and those of the kingdom are simply not the same.

—Ken Durham

Man: God's Darling or an Afterthought?

By Allan J. McNicol

No one would question that there are vast developments in technological information and application taking place today. But it is often overlooked that equally momentous changes are happening within the thinking of man about himself and his way of looking at the world—especially in the way he perceives his role and destiny.

By and large, before the nineteenth century western man could engage in the luxury of seeing himself at the center of the world. Julian Hartt used the felicitous phrase "the darling of God" to describe this status which man reserved for himself (*The Restless Quest,* p. 123). But with the advent of such truly modern men as Darwin, Freud, and successive legions of social and physical scientists, a reorientation has taken place in the way we look at reality. Man is no longer perceived as God's darling. Instead, he is a mere speck of dust, who if by minute chance is noticed by God, must be singled out to live in estrangement and guilt. Man is not free. He is an instrument. As such, he is viewed as impotent and as one who cannot adequately cope with both his own inner irrational nature and the outer assault of complex social and political forces. In a bizzare twist on Darwin, it appears frequently that man has not ascended but has descended. He can be described as one who is not a noble being of divine origin but as one who is caught in a *Catch-22* existence.

For the Christian a key question must be raised about the ability of the biblical tradition to speak a word of hope in this situation. Few realize, despite the fact that the biblical message arose in an environment vastly different from our own, that it addresses similar ideas. There were people in those times who considered man the mere instrument and victim of a capricious existence. Nowhere does this confrontation emerge as clear as in the first three chapters of the book of Genesis.

In the present climate of theological sensationalism it is easy to get the public exicited about recondite arguments over the days of creation or about an expedition to discover fragments of the ark. We must remember, however, that the real issue of the early chapters of Genesis is the nature of man as he was perceived by the faithful in Israel in opposition to contrary views in this community and other places.

Contextually and dramatically, through the vehicle of the narrative framework of accounts about the beginning, man is viewed in Israelite faith as existing in a basic state of tension. He is in perpetual turmoil between viewing himself as the highest and noblest of God's creatures who is made to have dominion over the world, and coming to grips with the reality of a peculiar perversity which culminates in a tendency toward self destruction. In a real sense the issue is whether man is truly God's darling or victim. In order to treat descriptively this tension, two accounts of the origin and nature of man are included in the biblical saga about the beginning of the world.

As B. Davie Napier pointed out, neither the first nor the second perspective by itself was an adequate expression of Israel's faith (*From Faith to Faith,* p. 39). The picture of man that comes closest to reality, from both an ancient and modern perspective, can only emerge when the two narrative accounts are held in conjunction with one another. When the biblical account is allowed to speak in this way, it can enlighten and correct us in our current confused perceptions.

The first account about the way man truly is comes in Genesis 1:1-2:4a. The whole created order of the universe reaches its culmination in man. He is truly God's darling. He is made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26-27). Whatever this difficult passage may presuppose about a connection between the actual appearance of God and man, the intent of the text is clear. Man is a special being who, unlike the characterization in Mesapotamian myths, did not come from a union which had its origin in chaotic forces. Man was not one who was condemned to the lowest rank in creation, but one who continued to be perpetuated in the likeness of the one creator. He was the only creature who was blessed by God (Gen. 1:27). He was given dominion over the other created things (Gen. 1:28f.). Man's rest was on the seventh day, endowing him with certain status because God rested on that day (Gen. 2:1-4). Everything said about man in Genesis 1 highlights his dignity and the prominent role he should play in the ordered creation. Potentially, he would never be happy

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unless he lived up to his status as God's "darling."

How comforting this idea must have been to those faithful Jews of the exilic era! For they confronted the mighty Babylonian system, with its mythology that the royal dynasty was formed from the blood of the gods; the ordinary person thus owed to kingship some special allegiance. But for the Jew, the Babylonian kings did not have special prerogatives and insights, while ordinary men were at most mere afterthoughts, or at best slaves. All men (Babylonian and Jew alike) were made in the likeness of the one God (Ps. 8). No man or class of men could be subservient to another in the name of the divine.

And likewise to the doubting members of the Jewish community, who no longer could perceive the meaning of the terrible calamities that had come over them, came this word of reassurance: man is the final and highest accomplishment of the one Sovereign Creator. God would never abandon his creation. Man is made to cultivate it and enjoy its benefits.

Nevertheless, the reality about man is that his history is marked by frailty and brokenness. With remarkable perception, similar to the work of a skilled composer, the author of the second creation narrative molds a short epic about the weakness of human existence. In commencing his narrative with a statement of the priority of the earth in creation, the reader is introduced to the close tie that will be made btween man and the dust in this section (Gen. 2:4b). Man is taken from the ground (Gen. 2:7). He is *adham* (man) who comes from *adhamah* (ground). He is of the same matter as the plants and the animals (Gen. 2:9, 19). As he shares a common origin with plants and animals, he will also share a common destiny. After the fall, both man and animal experience temporality and decay (Gen. 3:19). Woman, man's companion, also shares in his destiny because she is taken from man's side (Gen. 2:21-23).

But as the action of the narrative moves forward, the vulnerability and weakness of mankind comes to the forefront in a confrontation between the woman and the serpent. In a deft piece of artistry featuring a well-blended mixture of the history-like and the extraordinary, the woman who is *'arom* (naked, i.e., also guileless and innocent) meets the serpent which is *'arum* (sly). The place of meeting is by the tree which seemed to promise a fruit which would bestow the ability to enjoy life at its most vital level. Betraying her origin, Eve reflected a frailty and susceptibility to corrupution which is characteristic of those who live in this world, whether it be the "publicans and sinners" of Jesus' day, or contemporary congressmen. Inevitably, Eve succumbed to the temptation of the serpent and ate the fruit even though it was against the command of God.

To be sure, there is tremendous irony in the narrative. The reader must ask the question, "Why would anyone believe that the secrets of life could be discovered in a piece of fruit?" But this is precisely the point the narrative highlights—the mystery of human vulnerability in matters

Man was created in delicate balance. He was made only a little lower than the angels. Yet he was the most vulnerable to the abuse of this high status.

of the greatest importance. We do not trust the care of our bodies to anyone but the most qualified physician. We demand only an attorney with the highest credentials to present our defense in court. But when it comes to learning how truly to take care of our spiritual existence, like Eve, we are disposed to trust the most unlikely sources. It is silly to seek the secrets of life from a piece of fruit. But it is equally unrealistic to expect to find the fountain of youth from a drug, or the salvation of the world from a sixteen-year-old Indian youth.

The traditional interpretations of the fall have stressed the sin of pride or concupiscence (e.g., Augustine, Milton). There is no doubt that this factor is present in the decision of Eve. But one should perceive an equally important element in the story—Eve's peculiar weakness and vulnerability to the distortion of her priorities when she feels the true secret of existence is within her grasp. No better paradigm could be reproduced today to describe what it means to be human. We seldom are satisfied with our existence in the world. We perpetually seek to break beyond the barriers of our mortal limitations. At times we are convinced that with just one more course in Transcendental Meditation, or one new promotion, we will discover El Dorado and the secret of life will be discovered. Instead, we place in jeopardy our nervous systems and distort our relationship as creatures to the Creator.

There is a curious parallel between our situation and the early aviators. Through maximum utilization of flimsy resources, these men were able to build planes that would barely cross the Atlantic. But there was something within these aviators that did not allow them to be satisfied with such an accomplishment. They felt impelled to go on even more dangerous journeys until their planes, taxed beyond capacity, crashed over the Pacific or the North Pole.

Having gone beyond the limitations of the relationship to God which existed at creation, the descendents of Adam and Eve moved their lives precipitately toward chaos. Instead of being "darlings" men became "enemies."

The current emphasis on man's estrangement is only the latest datum in the chain of evidence that man was created in delicate balance. He was made only a little lower than the angels. Yet of all creatures he was the most vulnerable to the abuse of this high status.

The successive chapters in Genesis after the fall narrative also bear out this point. Man was destined to live in history in perpetual conflict with both himself and his environment. Man had sought the prerogative of becoming

divine; but he found that his rebellion led only to the discovery of his impotence and self-destruction. Comically, man seems to pose a threat to God (Gen. 3:22-24). Tragically, because of his own peculiar vulnerability, man can do nothing but live in revolt against God. Cain kills Abel (Gen. 4:1-16). After the establishment of the cities, polygamy, and further violence arrives (Gen. 4:17, 19, 23-24). Evil has penetrated the cosmos itself (Gen. 6:1-4). The rebellion reaches its natural conclusions in the narratives about the flood and the tower of Babel (Gen. 6:5-8:22; 11:1-9).

Today, one can continue to chronicle a similar state of affairs. Man is fragile and his life tends toward cruel excesses; yet he still bears the imprint of the divine. Man seeks to live in happiness and wholeness, but seems to be peculiarly vulnerable to failure. And so we must come to ask again our earlier question. Assuming the accuracy of our analysis, can we speak a word of hope?

One can only be struck by the similarity between the structure of this question and the one faced by the apostle Paul when he lived under the quite different circumstances of the Law. He had set out with the best intention to show his obedience to God through keeping the traditional tenets of the Covenant. But this seemed to be the precise source of his dilemma. As in the case of Eve, a particular frailty and vulnerability raised its ugly head. His demise became greater the more he kept the Law (Rom. 3:20). A peculiar perversity fastened its grip upon him (Rom. 7:15-17). His cry became "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (7:24).

We are not left in any suspense as to the word of hope that came to Paul in his state of despair. In the next verse (7:25) he states the word of victory. Deliverance comes from God through Jesus Christ. The story of Jesus' life indicated to him that God had not left man a victim to an odd susceptibility to make wrong choices.

For, in Christ, God elevated the process of making difficult choices to a different dimension. God demonstrated in the life of his Son, that even in the most problematic areas of human existence he was present in the form of redeeming love, transforming life into something ultimately worthwhile.

Paul learned this lesson, and we can learn it, too. Through God's grace our struggles took on a different character as a result of his presence with us in them (Gal. 2:20). Human vulnerability toward excess and sin did not change merely because God in Christ became involved in the problematic character of human existence. But there is the assurance that in the uncertain struggles of our lives God is molding a new creature who is not the mere instrument of competing forces and choices, but one who reflects God's intent that we live in his image. □

Fallow Field

An old field that is tired and worn from yielding
Good grain for harvesting—good, solid ears,
Lies fallow for awhile and slowly gains
New strength and power for the coming years.

An old field rests, and does not question why.
The resting is an edict made by God.
And man, a puny and helpless thing,
Must always follow in the ways of sod.

From dust he came, to dust he shall return.
He must, with patience, wait the Master's will.
Acquiescent, I shall calmly lie and wait,
My furrows barren, dry and dark and still.

But it will be for just a little while
That I withdraw from all the ways of men
To lose my weakness, gain new strength and power.
Then I rise with strength to serve again.

Roy Z. Kemp

LOOKING OUT

HIGHLIGHTS OF 1976

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS

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PHOTO KEY:

1. Against the backdrop of Independence Hall—where the United States was born—and the Philadelphia skyline, religious leaders take part in an Interfaith Bicentennial Service on the nation's 200th birthday. It was one of numerous interreligious observances held throughout the country.

2. Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist deacon, staged a successful quest for the presidency. The Democratic candidate's public professions of faith raised new awareness and discussions of being "born again." Religion received an unusual amount of attention during the campaign.

3. Marilyle Sweet Page, a deacon, cries with joy on her husband's shoulder as it is announced that the Episcopal Church's General Convention voted in favor of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

4. Students practice Transcendental Meditation in a New Jersey classroom. A coalition was formed to oppose government-sponsored TM programs in five New Jersey high schools. Calling TM a "thinly disguised form of the Hindu religion," the coalition said the programs violate the concept of church-state separation.

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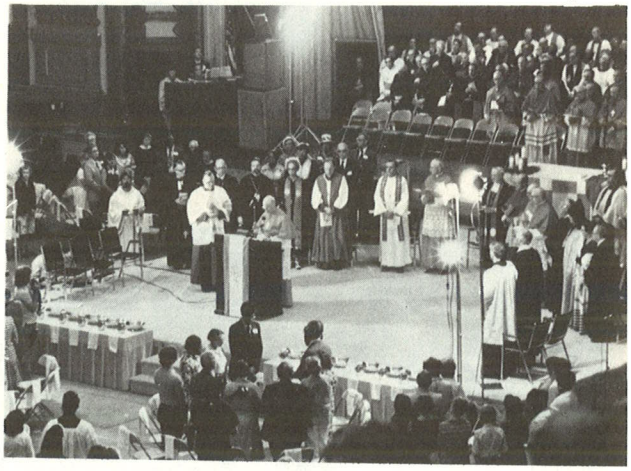

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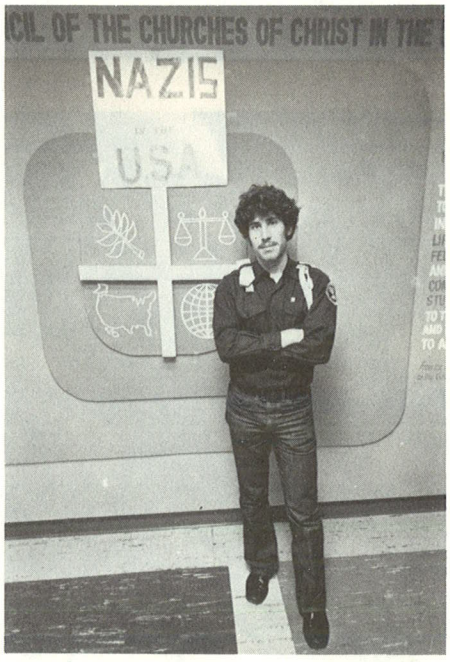

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RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS

PHOTO KEY:

5. Demonstrators march in front of the St. Louis headquarters of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, protesting the action of Dr. J.A.O. Preus, the denomination's president, in removing four district presidents from office. The long-anticipated split in the Missouri Synod came about in 1976 with the formation of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. More than 140 congregations affiliated with the AELC.

6. The outgoing Consultation on Church Union president, Bishop Frederick Jordan of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, congratulates his successor, Dr. Rachel Henderlite, following her election during COCU's plenary meeting in Dayton. Dr. Henderlite, who was the first woman minister in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S., is the first woman to head the ten-denomination organization, which in November issued a theological basis for union.

7. Unable to celebrate communion—a sign of unity—together, representatives from many Christian traditions gather during the Roman Catholic International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia to "do what we can until we can meet our Lord as Host," no longer at "separate tables." An ecumenical symposium was also held during the Eucharistic Congress.

8. A member of Betar, a militant Jewish youth organization, stands in front of the National Council of Churches symbol to which a placard stating "Nazis in the U.S.A." had been attached. The group staged a six-hour occupation of the NCC offices in New York in protest against Romanian Orthodox Archbishop Valerian Trifa's membership on the NCC Governing Board. Several Jewish groups charged that Archbishop Trifa had been a member of the Romanian Iron Guard and had taken part in anti-Jewish activities during World War II.

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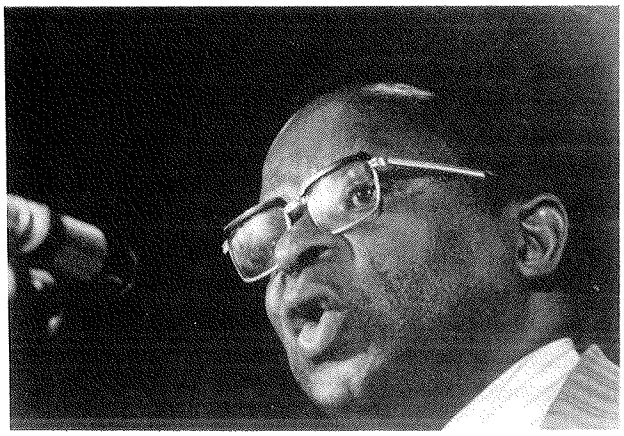

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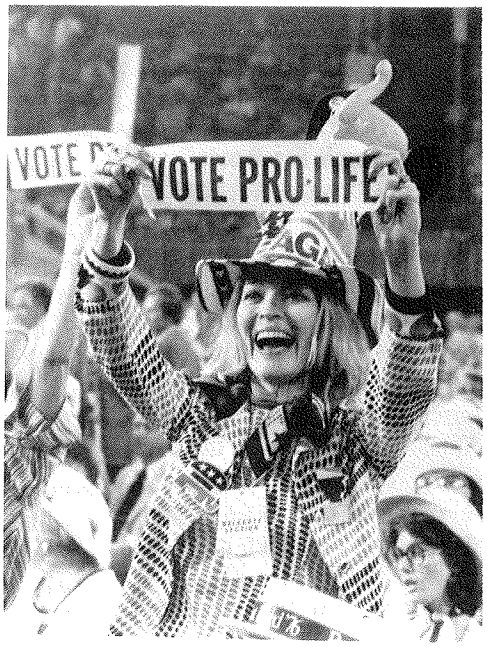

PHOTO KEY:

9. The discovery of some 16,000 tablets of the ancient Kingdom of Ebla in northern Syria was the major archeological event of the year. Some scholars suggested that the tablets—some of which are shown here as they were discovered—may throw new light on Old Testament history.

10. Controversy swirled around the Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church throughout the year. Mr. Moon's teachings were termed anti-Semitic and at variance with Christian theology and the Moon movement came under Congressional scrutiny regarding its ties with the South Korean Government. On the other hand, "deprogramming" young members of the Unification Church and other religious groups was criticized by some. Mr. Moon, shown addressing his followers at his church's training center in Barrytown, N.Y., held large rallies in New York and Washington in 1976.

11. United Methodist Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa of Rhodesia, head of the African National Council, took part in the negotiations in Geneva aimed at a gradual transition of power to the black majority in Rhodesia.

12. Anti-abortionists celebrate after the Republican National Convention defeated an attempt to exclude an abortion plank from the party's platform. The action placed the Republican Party on record in offering its support to those seeking a constitutional amendment to bar abortion. During the early phases of the presidential campaign, it appeared that abortion would become a major issue, with anti-abortionists criticizing Jimmy Carter for refusing to support a "right-to-life" amendment.

BOOKS

A Black Man's

By Bobbie Lee Holley

Readers are invited to submit reviews to Mrs. Holley, at 1508 Ephesus Church Rd., Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27514.

ROOTS by Alex Haley (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1976); 587 pp., $12.50.

Reviewed by Edward G. Holley, dean of the School of Library Science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Anyone who has ever sat enthralled as Alex Haley narrated the story of his "Search for Roots," will have looked forward to the appearance of this book. He or she will not be disappointed, for Haley writes as well as he speaks. Despite its length, the story which emerges from Haley's ten-year search for his black ancestors is rich in detailed description, moving in its portrayal of individual blacks caught up in the evils of slavery, and fascinating as a glimpse of how one black family handed down its oral tradition from generation to generation.

Haley determined to reconstruct the saga of this American family as faithful to the original sources as he could get. As he has described to numerous audiences, he had no idea that the task would take him to libraries and museums in Africa, Europe, and the United States, consuming enormous amounts of time as he pursued elusive details relentlessly. In that respect he is more fortunate than most blacks would be. His ancestors—from the "African" Kunta Kinte, through Kizzy, "Chicken George," Tom the blacksmith, and finally his own father, Simon Alexander Haley in Henning, Tennessee—were a relatively cohesive family group and managed to stay together as a unit better than most slave families. They kept the oral tradition going, much as the tribal families of the ancient Near East must have done with stories out of which our Bible emerged.

One of the most moving parts of *Roots,* a section earlier published in *Reader's Digest*, occurs near the end when the author recounts his first meeting with the old *griot* in the back country of Gambia. *Griots* are the walking archives of tribal history who can repeat for days on end the story of a tribe. Haley remarks how struck he was with the biblical parallels as the *griot* the Kinte clan recounted the details of his ancestral history. It was something like "and so-and-so took as a wife so-and-so, and begat . . . and begat . . . ." (p. 578). He describes his reaction: "There is an expression called 'the peak experience'—that which emotionally, nothing in your life ever transcends. I've had mine, that first day in the back country of black West Africa" (p. 576).

Before Haley gets to Africa, though, he has traced his family from the village of Juffure, in 1750, through all the subsequent generations to the post-Civil War period when Chicken George and his son Tom Murray moved the freed slave family from Alamance County in North Carolina to a new community in Lauderdale County, Tennessee.

Much of the early part of the book deals with life in Africa in the eighteenth century, the growing up of Kunta Kinte, the experience of being a member of the Kinte tribe, observing its Moslem religious rites, and undergoing "manhood training" that officially welcomed him into the life of an adult. Then there is the capture of Kunta Kinte by slave traders, the dreadful trip across the Atlantic, the arrival at Annapolis in America, Kunta's sale, his four attempts to escape and the consequent cutting off of half his right foot, and finally his settling into slave life on the William Waller plantation in Virginia.

If Haley's intention is to remind his readers of the cruelty of man's inhumanity to man, he certainly succeeds. Anyone wishing to idealize the paternal instincts of the planter class, even the relatively benign Murrays in North Carolina, will not get much support from Haley's book. What he will get is a picture of what slavery meant economically to the South and to the slave owners, a view which reflects some recent revisionist studies of the economic viability of slavery.

Kunta Kinte is the hero of the book. He finally takes the advice of one of the other slaves on the Waller plantation and tries to make the best of a bad situation, though he never loses his sense of dignity and his African pride. Eventually, at the age of 39, he marries Bell, the plantation cook, and sires a daughter, Kizzy, to whom he relates the story of his past and insists that she repeat it to future generations. The story of Kunta Kinte occupies over half the book, down to chapter 84, where Kizzy is sold because she has forged a pass to help a young eighteen-year-old male slave, Noah, attempt to escape.

Bought by a North Carolina "cracker," Tom Lea, who had schemed and achieved modest wealth with a few slaves, Kizzy undergoes the indignity of what Howard

;earch for Roots

Washington Odum in his *Way of the South* called "The Grandeur that Was Not." Tom Lea assigns the sixteen-year old Kizzy to the fields during the day and makes her his sexual plaything during the night. From this relationship comes George, a bright lad, "high yeller," who comes to share Massa Lea's enthusiasm for game cock fighting, hence the nickname "Chicken George."

This is no father-son story, for the code would not have permitted it even if Tom Lea had been interested. Their common bond was an interest in game cocks. Chicken George made some money from "hack fighting," permitted by his master who shared the profits. An idea grew in Chicken George's mind to try to save enough money to buy freedom for himself, his wife, his brood of eight children, and his mother, Kizzy. His hopes are doomed to disappointment when Lea loses almost all of his economic assets to Sir C. Eric Russell as a result of a cockfighting match. George, as a part of the loss, has to go abroad to train chickens for Lord Russell.

During the four years he is gone, Tom Lea is forced to sell George's family to the Murrays in Alamance County, North Carolina. A reasonably good master, as masters went, Murray appreciates the blacksmithing skill of Chicken George's son Tom, and the family eventually spends the Civil War there. George returns from England on the eve of the Civil War, finds his family gone, and gets Massa Lea drunk so he can secure his promised freedom paper. He proceeds to Alamance County only to learn that he cannot stay there as a free Negro, and then disappears until after the war when he returns to lead his family to the promised land of Henning, Tennessee.

Haley portrays his family members as they were—some talented, some dense, but all with a deep sensitivity to what it means to be a slave. As many of their kind, they adopted a posture of submission and grinning obsequiousness which concealed their real feelings. The irascible cracker, Tom Lea, knows this, but it irritates him. In one scene when Chicken George answers him, "Yassuh,

Massa," he replies, "Yassuh, Massa! That's the nigger answer to everything" (p. 422). The obsequious Chicken George, who knows how to manipulate his master and how to be sensitive to his everchanging moods, nonetheless lives his life in the hope that he can eventually buy his family free—an achievement that comes only with general emancipation after the war is over. The white fear of black ideas, at which they can only guess, increases with the approach of the Civil War. In the slave quarters, however, where freedom seems an impossible dream, the human spirit, with its longing to be free, persists in spite of the repression and rapaciousness of the slave owners.

Obviously, not all of this book is objective history, though the descriptions of life in the African back country, the details of an African slave ship, and such matters as the prices of slaves and their behavior are reasonably accurate. What Haley has done is to enter the personalities of his ancestors and recreate them as people reacting to other people and the events of their time. The *persona* and their names are from the record books. The reconstruction of the conversations and the behavior patterns have to be fictionalized, while major events such as slave owner Tom Lea's cockfighting loss to Lord Russell and Chicken George's period in England, are probably verifiable. This is not to disparage Haley's research. He has verified what he can, made educated guesses, and used his enormous author's talents to convey the emotions and thoughts of his family. As my wife has often said when she finished a good historical novel, that is not a bad way to introduce one to the historical period. On that score Haley's book is superb.

What is the message of this book for *Mission* readers? The human family is always looking at its past to see what lessons it can learn and to make some judgments about the future. That means portrayal of human life as it is, often sordid, occasionally bestial, but always with a longing for the freedom and dignity of the individual.

For white readers the book will give insight into the black past, unknown territory for most of us. It will remind black readers that there were people of dignity, courage, and talent in their past, even when everything in the environment seemed to conspire against them. That message needs to be reinforced in our own day; and we need to weep with Haley "for all of history's incredible atrocities against fellowmen, which seems to be mankind's greatest flaw" (p. 580).

□

Truth and Power: Thoughts on Political Morality

By Gary Thompson

Politics is as inescapable to the twentieth century Christian as death and taxes. For better or for worse, we have, as St. Augustine affirmed, a dual citizenship in the City of God and the City of Man. While we may renounce our commitments to the former, we are inextricably bound to the latter. In defining our role as citizens in the City of Man, it is of more than casual importance that we ponder the perennial questions which this dual citizenship calls forth. Moreover, as "political animals" (Aristotle's term) and, paradoxically, as "little lower than angels" thoughtful Christians are brought to consider the incongruities and conflicts between our political and religious obligations. Jacques Ellul reminds us that the Bible shows us that politics is not simply a human action of no concern to us. "It may be that politics is the kingdom of the devil, but this certainly concerns us as Christians."

POLITICAL MORALITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

At a minimum, politics is about the pursuit of, and use of, power. The abuse of power is a common theme throughout the Old Testament, especially in the historical books. Again and again the message comes through that the root of the abuse of power lies in the sin of pride, the nigh irresistible temptation for the powerful to substitute their own law for God's law, and, in the process, to fall prey to a consuming moral obtuseness. We find a classic instance of this process in 2 Samuel 11.

We have in this passage all of the elements of a modern political novel; the euphoria that follows political and military success; the allurements of illicit sex to men in power; intrigue and treachery in high places. And from one of the most principled of God's men—King David. A self-effacing conscientious youth was transformed by power into an unprincipled lecher. The vivid observation of Alexander Solzhenitsyn is appropriate: "Pride grows in the human heart like lard on a pig." Two centuries earlier John Adams observed that the love of power grows because human passions are insatiable.

The story is familiar to all of us. King David, having secured his place on the throne, falls victim to the enticements of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of the soldier Uriah. Then in an act of unspeakable cynicism, arranges to have Uriah killed in battle. It is a doleful commentary upon David's character that he seems to have no remorse for his deed until confronted by the prophet Nathan.

In this confrontation, Nathan procedes obliquely at first

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with a parable, one of the most poignant in the Scriptures (2 Samuel 12:1-7).

"There were two men in one city, the one rich and the other poor.
"The rich man had a great many flocks and herds.
"But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished;
And it grew up together with him and his children.
It would eat of his bread and drink of his cup and lie in his bosom.
And it was like a daughter.

"Now a traveler came to the rich man,
And he was unwilling to take from his own flock or his own herd,
To prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him;
Rather he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

Then David's anger burned greatly, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die. And he must make restitution for the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing and had no compassion." Nathan then said to David, "You are the man."

Notice the outrage of David at another man's act of greed. The king screws up all of his moral outrage to anathematize this hypothetical figure little realizing that he is the man. The lesson clearly hits home today to those of us who would rush to judgment over the sins of others.

But there are other lessons here as well, more relevant to the subject of politics. The prophet Nathan was no sycophant, no toady. He refused to truckle before power. It has always been fashionable for the religious community to sanctify the sins of the powerful. Nathan possessed the courage and integrity to *speak the truth to power,* a quality in short supply in any age. In confronting power with truth, Nathan risked much, but in so doing he preserved the integrity of a timeless moral principle—that truth knows no rank. It is equally incumbent upon Christians today—whatever their station in life—to demand of their leaders moral rectitude and honesty, whatever the risk. Indeed, an absolutely unbending commitment to truth is the *sine que non* of a political morality, for, if recent political experience teaches us anything it is the disastrous consequences of lies and deceit to the political system.

The moral imperative of speaking the truth to power regardless of the consequences is the primary lesson relevant to politics in this episode in 2 Samuel. (The confrontation succeeded in time in cutting through David's moral obtuseness, resulting in his repentance.) This confrontation of truth and power adumbrates later such occasions as the disputes between Thomas a Becket and Henry II and Sir Thomas More and Henry VIII. Each was a dramatic confrontation of truth and power.

SIGNPOSTS TOWARD A MODERN POLITICAL ETHIC

David's kingdom existed in a simpler time. Mass political participation was unthinkable. Because human nature is changeless, the lesson here is timeless; but human institutions are transformed, and we must search the scriptures for ethical signposts which can guide his children in relating to these institutions. There are other lessons to be gained from this passage—more oblique, more dimly perceived, but at least implicitly present.

In order to speak the truth to power, we must know what it is. Which means that *our* lives must rest upon an unshakable ethical foundation. If our sense of right and wrong has been eroded by the moral relativism of our age we have little to offer in the way of ethical counsel to the larger society or to its leaders.

At the same time, our moral certitude should be confined to areas where its application is appropriate. Nothing so dilutes the Christian witness today as the headlong support by certain religious groups of social programs that are ill-conceived and ultimately counterproductive. Of all people, Christians with their biblical view of the perversity of human nature should be restrained in their optimism about social intervention.

As we seek to infuse our politics with morality we must reckon with a melancholy reality about democracies, namely, that the morality of its politics seldom rises above the moral ethos of the day. We must act with the understanding that *vox populi* is seldom if ever *vox dei;* that politics, being a human pursuit, is tainted with sin. We can as Christians ameliorate the abuses of politics, but we can

never moralize it in any holistic sense.

There is a profound truth underlying a former British Prime Minister's wry response to an appeal for moral leadership from his office: "If the nation wants moral leadership it should consult the archbishop." As a rule democratic leaders do not—perhaps cannot—rise above the common level of public or private morality.

Americans are often beguiled by the "trickle down theory of morality." Like its cousin, the "trickle down theory of economics," it maintains that high moral standards (or prosperity) are promoted throughout society as men of high character assume office; that moral rectitude then cascades downward, elevating the general level of morality. The assumption was dubious in David's day and is practically out of the question in a democratic society. As Lincoln observed, in democratic societies the people generally get the kind of government they deserve.

PREFACE TO A CHRISTIAN POLITICAL MORALITY

As Christians our *primary* commitment must not rest with a particular party or political personality or institution. Nathan was more concerned with truth than with the monarchy or saving his own skin. Perhaps the most distressing insight to be gained from a reading of the Watergate literature is the lengths to which men would go—men who see themselves as acting in the public interest—to lie and dissimulate in order to save an abstraction called The Presidency.

Christians are, properly understood, citizens of the world calling the world to share in the grace of God, not to a particular political philosophy or institution. I believe that democratic governments, with their abundant personal liberties, are the most humane forms of government that man has yet contrived and worthy of our support. Yet, I must reject the corollary that democratic governments—or any other human institution—are the incarnation of God's will. Superpatriotism, after all, is a form of idolatry. Our primary commitment is to an unalterable, revealed moral code, and our allegiance to any worldly institution must be squared with the obligations of this higher calling.

This view of the limits of politics should by no means lead to a retreat from political participation. We are inescapably a part of our political system in that our *inaction* as well as our action has consequences. "Not to decide," someone has said, "is to decide." Edmund Burke once remarked that all evil needs to triumph is that good men do nothing. If good men do not combine, he added, "They will fall, one by one, and unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."

Despite all the cautions and disclaimers, the children of God have much good to contribute to the sustaining of the political order. The following briefly states a preface to a Christian political ethic which follows from and is consistent with the framework discussed above. A Christian morality consistent with a biblical view of man's place in the cosmos would be characterized by

. . . An uncompromising commitment to truth in political discourse, tempered with an acute awareness of human fallibility.

. . . A biblical commitment to social justice stemming from a prophetic identification with the dispossessed.

. . . Resistance to appeals for unfettered power (however benign it appears) based upon a biblical awareness of man's rapacious appetite for power and his capacity for its abuse.

. . . A cultivated spirit of civility and moderation derived from a guarded pessimism about politicians and their utopian visions and their need to act in self-serving ways.

. . . A determination to rise above partisan loyalties when those loyalties call upon us to behave contrary to the fruits of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. With the air full of the sound of grinding political axes, it is appropriate that Christians respond with lowered voices.

. . . An abiding commitment to the rule of law when law is consonant with our overriding commitment to the rule of Christ in our lives.

There is a remarkable consensus today among serious scholars and writers—many of them with no particular religious credentials—that the crisis of Western Civilization is a crisis of meaning; that deliverance can come only with a revitalization of morality based upon religious belief. Christians affirm that religious belief is vigorous only when it is grounded upon a God who reveals himself through his actions in human history as he has done in this account in 2 Samuel. The power of the sordid tale of David's sin is God's ability to confront us with perennial questions of truth and power. The drama which engaged Nathan and David is as old as human sin and as fresh as Watergate and Chappaquiddick or, on a more demoniacal level, Auschwitz and Gulag Archepelago. Nathan's charge—"You are the man"—is an ageless challenge to each of us who must weigh the demands of truth and power.

□

CORRECTION

The December issue mistakenly by-lined David Ottinger as co-author of "The Community's Pulpit." As the identification line read, *Charles* Ottinger was the actual author. *Mission* apologizes for this error.

What About the Morality of Sex Change Operations?

The estimated 10,000 sex change operations made or considered during the last year in the U.S. received low moral marks in *Mission's* recent opinion response. None of the respondents considered the practice "all right." One weighed evidence on both sides and then registered a "don't know" opinion.

Most of those responding viewed the issue negatively because they associated the desire for sex changes with homosexuality or perversion. Dick James, Jr., of New Shrewsbury, New Jersey, noted that the desire for a sex change is usually expressed by those who, while trapped in a body of one sex, have the drives, emotions, and desires of the opposite sex. If such drives rule them, these persons become guilty of such perversions as those condemned in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:26-27.

Sexuality as a gift from God with which we should be content was also a consistent theme. Doug Cheaney of Bismarck, Missouri, wrote that being dissatisfied with one's God-given sexuality may indicate deeper opposition to God's will. If so, a sex change would not be a cure but rather a stopgap measure by one "who had rather switch than fight."

Victor Knowles of West Concord, Minnesota, noted that the desire to change one's sex indicated not only a rejection of God's will, but of oneself. He cited the prophet's warning: "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" (Isa. 45:9). He said that "Scripture indicates that God, before we were born, prescribed our unchangeable features in accordance with his plan for our lives" (Ps. 139:16).

A similar idea was expressed by Mrs. Merle S. Knight of Lubbock, Texas. She pointed out, from Genesis 2:7 and 22 that God *made* humans male and female, and that persons should not tamper with their nature. This "givenness" was also the basis for some correspondents indicating sex organ operations are of a different nature than other organ transplants. Artificial or transplanted sex organs, said James, hardly constitute a "sex change." In fact, the change is so superficial as to render the idea an illusion. Stan Tucker of Stillwater, Oklahoma, said that if any change is needed it is in our attitude toward what God has made us.

Ironically, for J.A. Bryan of Duncanville, Texas, this givenness of sexuality is the very ground for allowing some doubt about the immorality of the issue. The question, he said, is almost like asking whether being born is right or wrong—wrong for whom? In neither case are we able to choose; hence moral judgments may require more knowledge than is accessible to us: "Who can comprehend the mind of God?" Bryan also asked whether male and female are actually so opposite that an "all right" or "all wrong" answer can be given.

The general sense of the responses, however, was that human sexuality is so closely identified with life as it comes from God that to tamper with it is wrong. Yet there was also general appreciation for airing the issue and encouraging a response from the viewpoint of Christian ethics.

FORUM

Good and Confusing

I received *Mission* as a gift. It seems to be a good magazine, but I am becoming confused as to your theological stand. In the article, "On Staying or Leaving . . ." (November issue), Mary Lou Walden states that Jennifer "married a strong Christian of another religious body." Perhaps this was a misprint or it is the reason these women, as well as many others, are in the dilemma they are in. The Church of Christ is the Highway to Heaven or it is not. If it is, there are not strong Christians in other religious bodies. If it is not, then we all ought to know it and quit this "true to the Book" preaching. Please help me on this matter.

JOSH STAFFORD
Madera, Calif.

• *We welcome our new reader to a journal which exists, in part, to air views with which the editor may disagree. In this case, however, we must confess agreement with Mrs. Walden's statement. We do not believe it is true to the Book to say or imply that only those folk in one or another of the non-instrumental segments of the Restoration Movement are on the Highway to Heaven.*

—Editor.

Mission in Romania?

John McRay's reference to the Romanian church reminded me of an experience I had while I was there chaperoning an exhibition in 1974. I was in Iasi, in the northeastern part of the country, about fifteen miles from the Soviet border, for two weeks. Understandably, I had a little time on my hands, and my translator suggested that, being a religious person, I might enjoy an audience with the Metropolitan of Moldavia. I consented and the interview was set.

We arrived and were ushered into a large library with a big table in the center of the room. The Metropolitan greeted me in French, and I quickly forgot all the French I'd ever commanded and relied strictly on the interpreter. After a visit about the exhibition that I had brought to town, the Metropolitan asked what church I attended. I answered, "Protestant, Church of Christ," thinking that he would have no idea what I was talking about.

But the Metropolitan proved to be a more sophisticated man than I had anticipated, and he said, "Oh, yes, I know it well." He went on to explain that we were similar to the Disciples of Christ.

I asked if he had talked with any leaders of our church during his visits to the U.S., and he, quite properly, said that he had not, that he was under the impression that we had no leaders.

I acknowledged the truth of his remark and asked what else he knew of the Church of Christ. He seemed a bit vague at this point, sure only that we professed love above dogma, a point that I gracefully accepted rather than quibble.

Encouraged by this exchange, I asked if he had ever read or heard of a small magazine called *Mission.* He seemed to rake his mind, then said, "Yes, someone gave me a copy once." He jumped up and ran into his private library and returned with a book on the California missions, complete with color photographs.

Trying to recover, I noted that I had seen what I thought were several similarities between the Orthodox church and the Church of Christ: a capella music, literal interpretation of the Scriptures, for example. He seemed uneasy on this point—I found out that he was scheduled to be the next Patriarch of Romania and was therefore a good politician—but did admit that the Church of Christ was a "sympathetic" church.

There I left it, delighted that we had talked of something more than the weather, but unsure of what we had accomplished.

I attended worship in his church the following day and was thoroughly disabused of any similarity that I might have thought existed between us and them, and developed anew my native American sympathy for a "democratic church."

RON TYLER
Fort Worth, Texas

CROSS CURRENTS

A NEW YEAR'S INVENTORY

A regular winter meeting of *Mission's* executive board recently provided a convenient time to reflect on our assets and liabilities. From a financial standpoint, we rejoice that overall, despite a critical cash flow problem, we are better off than we have been in many months. This is due to sacrificial giving on the part of several on our board, led by Norman Parks, and to many concerned friends who are helping us settle a sizable backlog of debts.

Of even more crucial concern, however, are our assets and liabilities in terms of purpose—our capacity to be good stewards of the trust which you, the subscriber, place in us. Here are what I conceive to be *Mission's* primary opportunities and aims:

To be a responsibly "prophetic" voice. By prophetic I mean that we must not shun from speaking the word of God's judgment on whatever opposes his work of love and grace, whether within or without the church. By responsible I mean we must admit that authors and editors also stand under God's judgment; and that our critiques must be for the purpose of increasing the love of God in the world and the church, not diminishing it.

To describe and evaluate significant events, both the bright and the dark. We concentrate on events among "non-instrumental Churches of Christ" (and welcome information about them from our readers).

To provide an analytical tool for grappling with issues facing God's people in God's world. We must face both new and continuing questions: the church's relationship to the world, the meaning and function of Scripture, how Christians can respond to various crises, problems of faith. In short, we have the opportunity to serve as a popular journal of theology and life.

To serve as an open forum for differing views. Not only do we offer a "letters" section; we invite articles from those who disagree with us ("us" being an editor and board who have lively disagreements themselves).

To offer an outlet for creative Christian writing. Prose and poetry, articles and essays—it is a genuine thrill to give exposure to new talent and new ideas. There are few similar opportunities among Churches of Christ.

To be realistic, these goals must be balanced against certain liabilities. With rising publishing and postal costs, we face a cash shortage. More basic, many in our fellowship simply do not read. Particularly do they often resist reading new or difficult ideas in religion. We tire easily of the rigors of analysis in any field; many of us especially want to keep religion light and easy. We do not like a steady diet of the "prophetic"; aspiring prophets should by now surely be forewarned that they are more frequently stoned than thanked. And, most distressing of all, there is the danger that our work of describing the good and the bad, of airing other than laundered linen, will win for us the reputation that we do not love the church.

Both assets and liabilities were confronted frankly at our recent meeting. It would not have been surprising had the obstacles discouraged us. Instead, we found our spirits rising, our hopes expanding. If you share our goals, will you also share the responsibility of helping us reach them? Sizable subsidies are still needed. You can also help us find new readers—others for whom the journal's assets will be important.

For we find ourselves identifying with the apostle Paul, when he noted that the very obstacles in his work at Ephesus formed the basis of his potential there. We say with him: "I will stay . . . for a wide door for effective work has opened for me, *and* (not "although"!) there are many adversaries."

—RD

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Coming Next Month:

Three articles focus on evangelism—

Bruce Edwards, Jr., takes a shot at "The Madison Avenue Gospel."

Neil Gallagher asks about our motives for missions.

Dr. James Carley and James R. Moore co-author a piece on medical evangelism.

Also, Michael Hall asks whether the church is adequately ministering to the divorced.